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Epilepsy

Epilepsy

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Introduction

Non est vivere, sed valere, vita. Mart.

It was my intention to have written on a species of Eupatorium the medical qualities of which have lately been discovered (in South Carolina) to possess extraordinary virtues, in the cure of the bite of the Rattle Snake: but being disappointed in getting sufficient & satisfactory information relative to this plant, I am obliged at a late period of this course to make choice of an other subject, & have now to beg your indulgence while I offer a few hasty remarks on Epilepsy.

Having had an opportunity of seeing this disease & its treatment, I make it the subject of the present dissertation, but not without some degree of diffidence, as I am aware of its being a disease difficult to understand; & when once completely formed that it has baffled the skill of some of the ablest physicians; & by many it has been thought incurable. I am inclined however to believe that this disease may be cured even in its most inveterate forms.

I trust it will not be considered arrogant at my early age in coming forward to attack this bold disease when I shall have stated some facts that confirm me in this opinion.

On this subject it will not be expected that I could give many original ideas as it has been ably treated by Professors Cullen, Rush, & Barton; & in preparing this dissertation I avail myself of the information which I have acquired from these gentlemen, & also from my own observation, which although limited I hope will not be without interest.

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In submitting this Essay to the examination of the Faculty, I would feel much anxiety for its fate, were I not sensible that their candour, & liberality, are equal to their learning.

An Essay on Epilepsy.

This disease is placed by Doct. Cullen in the class of Neuroses, & third order of Spasmi.

It is defined, as consisting in convulsions of the greater part of the muscles of voluntary motion, attended with a loss of sense, & ending in a state of insensibility & sunning sleep.

It has frequently been observed that the general character and form of the disease appears the same in all the different persons whom it affects. It comes on with convulsions ~~of the great~~, ~~but~~ & sometimes attacks persons apparently in good health. After continuing for some time it goes off leaving the patient in his usual health. These fits are sometimes preceded by premonitory signs, such as a general restlessness, & uneasiness, headach, vertigo, bitter taste in the mouth, odour of breath, redness of the face, noise in the ears, palpitation, constipation of the bowels together with flatulency of the stomach, & intestines, & pain in some of the extremities, pimples on the tongue, sleepiness, & all the horrors of death anticipated by the unfortunate person.

These signs ~~will~~ frequently appear two or three days before the fall, particularly in the first fits, & afterwards come on frequently without any previous warning.

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Before the fit comes on in other persons there is a sensation
lled the Aura Epileptica. The patient describes it as if
drop of cold water, or vapour was moving in some part
the limbs, or body, most frequently beginning in the toes, or
ngers; from thence ascending appears to the head, & when
arrives there the person immediately falls down in an
pileptic fit. But these signs do not commonly appear
ing before the attack, nor are they as frequent prelude
those mentioned above. It is said by experienced
rsons, that the best common warnings of the approach
the falling sickness, (as it is called by the common
ople) are pains in the bowels, numbness of the extremities,
imness of sight, blackness of the face, shortness of breath,
ccup, vomiting & purging, pain in the back & disposition
faint, & sometime the fit will rise no higher than this,
the patient will escape for a time the attack: but
ost frequently the person falls in violent convulsions, the
ly are variously agitated; sometime one side is more
tated than the other, the countenance much distorted, the
s inverted, fingers clenched, then a foaming at the mouth,
metimes mixed with blood, when (the tongue has been
tten) he loses all sense of feeling, & sometimes involun
tary

discharges of urine, & faeces. These convulsions last only a short time when an intermission takes place; but the fits are frequently renewed with great violence, & the length of time they last varies in different persons. After the convulsions have ceased, the patient generally falls into a stupid, insensible state, as if in a sound sleep; for 1, 2, or even 6 hours; he then gradually recovers his senses, but has no recollection of anything that took place in the paroxysm. During the fit the pulse & respiration are quick, & irregular, but after the convulsions, they return to their healthy state.

These are the general simptoms of the disease, but they vary in violence, & duration, in different persons, & at different times in the same person.

There is great variety in the returns of this disease, Many persons have several slight ~~fight~~ fits in a day - sometimes they occur seldomer once a day, or once a week - sometimes once a month, two, or three times a year - & the interval has been known to last 13 years, & then the attacks were renewed with greater violence.

The continuance of the fit is most commonly from a quarter of an hour, to 3 hours, & in more extraordinary cases the patient is stupid for two, or three days, during which time frequent convulsions occur. After convulsions some persons scarcely know that they have had them, being so little fatigued, or injured, while others feel great dullness, & numbness for several hours, or a head ache sickness & vomiting &

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not recover their faculties entirely for several days. Persons of any age are liable to ~~to~~ Epilepsy but it is oftener met with among children than grown persons, & there is a much greater probability of their getting rid of it. Boys are more subject to this disease than girls. Its returns are periodical & generally come on during the night, after the first nap, being some how influenced by sleep.

Convulsions are common with children from their birth to the 3 or 4 year & as this disease often ceases between the 3d & 4th year it is very probably occasioned by worms, or some affection of the stomach & intestines. In these cases there is always hope of a recovery.

Epilepsy has been observed to disappear about puberty when it commenced at an early age: but more frequently if it passes beyond five or six years it proves a tedious complaint. Some persons live to an old age in this disease & retain their faculties but little impaired, while others feel its increasing power, & realize its direful effects in the ~~the~~ ruin of their mental faculties, & in death its self.

Diagnosis. Epilepsy resembles Hysteria excepting that the latter is attended with Globus Hystericus. & generally appears in barren, & single women. It is easily distinguished from Chorea by the latter most frequently having partial convulsions of the leg, & arm of one side, & the senses remaining but little impaired. I am inclined to ~~think~~ this disease nearly allied to the Jerks.

Epilepsy is distinguished from ~~[illegible]~~ Tetanus by the latter

being attended with tonic spasms without the senses being much impaired, & ~~without~~ being followed by sleep.

Syncopia simulata may be easily distinguished from this disease by applying a Vol. Alkali, or by sticking the patient with a pin.

The occasional CAUSES of Epilepsy may be arranged under two heads first those that irritate the brain, & ~~secondly~~ those that weaken the brain. In the first when there is too great a quantity of blood carried by the arteries to the brain, & not being readily returned by the veins; the vessels are distended, the nerves affected & it is reasonable to suppose convulsions would come on. 2dly when there is not sufficient stimulus for the healthy action of the brain, convulsions take place - at other times syncope.

The Occasional causes are injuries of the head pain, worms, dentition, poisons, calculi; repelled eruptions, from costiveness gravidity in the stomach, from plethora - from debility, from suppression of customary evacuations, sudden frights in childhood which is a frequent cause of this disease, from Onanism - from fits of passion - great emotion of mind frequent intoxication - Hemorrhage of various kinds. (At Vienna out of 114 Epileptic patients this disease was produced in 8 from suppressed catamenia & in 6 from terror. Sympathy may produce it. Doctor Rush mentioned in his Lectures 6 persons who fell down in convulsions at seeing a person in a fit, & that 5 of a Portuguese family

[illegible] this disease. Doctor Barton relates in his lectures an instance of a woman who fell down in a fit at seeing a chariot or fire. Angelica Macifandica has been known to produce this disease.

Predisponent Causes. Epilepsy is sometimes hereditary. At other times it depends on a mobility of the sensorium; which Doctor Cullen says consists ~~in~~ either in sensibility, or irritability, & depends on one or the other. If an action excited, is, by repetition rendered more easily excited, & more vigorously performed; he considers this as an increase of irritability only; & is the reason why Epilepsy and convulsions of all kinds, by being repeated are more easily excited, readily become habitual, & are therefore more difficult to cure. This mobility which is the predisponing cause, depends more particularly upon debility, or upon a plethoric state of the system. Debility produces ~~an~~ sensibility which appears most frequently in women & children who are the most frequent subjects of this disease. Plethoric persons are frequent subjects of this disease. Bleed disposes to this disease.

Exciting Causes. Excesses of all kinds, as intoxication, heat, great exercise, frights, passions.

Appearances to be observed on dissection. dilation of some part of the brain, Serous or Sanguineous effusions — sometimes a larger sense state of the brain without any effusion. Sometimes adhesions appear — Excrescencies, & at other times the brain is indurated

Epilepsy has been usually distinguished into sympathetic & idiopathic. It is called sympathetic when it is produced from affection of some other part of the body as from costiveness, teething, or wounds. Called Idiopathic when it is a primary disease, & not dependant, or proceeding from any other.

In the cure of this disease I should be governed by the cause which occasioned it. When it is sympathetic, having been a wound, or blow on the head, I should make use of the remedies recommended by Doctor Physick & Dorsey in such cases, as blood letting, cathartics, cold applications, & antiphlogistic regimen &c. If this disease is produced by worms, which are a frequent cause among children, I would use such remedies as would dislodge, or destroy them, as mercurial purges, warm bath &c. Doctor Barton cured a case produced from this cause by Valerian, so I should use this medicine in combination with calomel. If the disease is caused from teething, we should scarify that part of the gums that appeared inflamed, open the bowels & bathe the feet in warm water. If fever comes on I should treat it as a fever, give saline draughts, spirits of Nitre, & antimonials. After the inflamatory symptoms subside & partial fever remains, I have found blisters behind the neck of great

[illegible] ~~to the extremities~~ to lessen the excitement in the heart
[illegible] bring on regular action. After this obtained the cure will
[illegible] performed. If the Disease is accompanied by the Aura
[illegible] Epileptica, we should endeavour to cut off the Communication
[illegible] the brain by a Ligature, which is related to have succ
[illegible]ded in the hands of Professor Osiander of Altona. If this plan
[illegible] should not succeed it is advised to cut out the part that gives
[illegible] to the Aura, or apply a Blister, or if the disease appears to
[illegible] proceed from compressed, or wounded Nerve, which can be com
[illegible] it would be proper to divide it as recommended in Tetanus
[illegible] the Disease proceeds from suppressed Evacuations such as
[illegible]emorrhoids, Leeches should be applied, as near the Haemorrhoi
[illegible]dal vessels as possible, Aloetic pills, and warm fomentations
[illegible] the part are recommended. If from Catamenia being suppressed
[illegible] should employ the Remedies recommended by Dr. Chapman
[illegible] that case. if the System be too much excited I would
[illegible]lood. if there be much debility I would have recourse to
[illegible]nourishing Diet Cathartics Polygala Senega with some Aroma
[illegible]tic, Elixir Pangaic, & the warm Bath.

remedies in the forming state of Epilepsy & to prevent the Disease
from coming on Dashing cold water in the face, Running, but which
is very detrimental is thrown on the Muscles Tying a ligature tight
under the nose, fresh air, sinapisms, blisters to the feet & Legs
& loosening the Patients clothes and elevating the head, are
proper and useful Dr Barton stopped a Paroxysm of
Epilepsy by Blisters and sinapisms It is a fact well authorized
that in some instances this Disease continues from Habit altho
the original cause have ceased to act as in a case I saw cured
by Blows the convulsions continued when their effects
thereon were over In such cases I hold it of the first importance
to make Nature of possible discontinue the Habit, &
the best plan of doing this particularly if we can foresee the
attack, or know the time of its return, is to give an Emetic of
Sulphate of Zinc & Sulphate of Copper, ~~and the dry account~~
an Hour before its approach this dose nauseates extremely,
relaxes the System, & prevents the Paroxysm, as in Intermittent
fever but if the symptoms continue to increase, & the patient
be of a plethoric Habit, he should be bled. Cold affusion is
also of great service in putting off the Paroxysm - Venesection

it be found necessary to resort to the lancet either
Blisters and Vinegar should be applied to the feet to increase the
fullness in the extremities, and Muscles, which will reflect in
favour system, & assist very much in relaxing the inflammatory
plethoric persons a vegetable, and milk Diet & Exercise are
necessary - Drastic Cathartics are of great importance as the
disease is generally attended with costiveness - after the
inflammatory symptoms are lessened we may give small
doses of Rectified Oil, and Digitalis gradually increasing
them & watching their Effects Opium has been recommended
in combination with this Medicine to prevent Colica pictonum;
but I would not give it when there is much plethora & no
irritability as it increases Costiveness, & the action of the Bowels
effects -
Bleeding is not advisable unless there be a great tendency,
and to the head & violent pain in that part - Low diet, Exercise
Cathartics Emetics and Digitalis are more useful in lessening
plethora, & do it more gradually & permanently I have found
no inconvenience in giving the Medicine without Opium as
Drastic Cathartics were frequently exhibited it should be
continued till its desired effects are obtained. Colon vient in

lied to the back of the neck and on the left arm. Whenever
a paroxysm I feel me should give an Emetic throw cold water
on the Head avoid all the exciting causes. After the arterial
action is completely reduced a Decoction of Viscus Quercinus
may be taken as common Drink. By pursuing this course and
I believe a cure may be obtained tho' the Disease have
been completely formed, & continued from Habit. I have been
attended with success in cases to be mentioned in the Sequel
Exclusions Diarrhoea from the treatment recommended in Epilepsy, given
when was marked Excitement in the System, and the disease contin
ued from Habit. The emetics were given to put off the Paro
xysm, & the other Medicines, with a view of reducing arterial
action to a healthy standard, without this we cannot expect
a cure. The Mixture is given as a tonic after reducing the
system. at the same time the patient should be informed that
it is a celebrated Remedy which may induce him to have
faith in the Medicine. It is highly spoken of by Dr. Fraser
he has written on Epilepsy. Setons are of service in deter
mining morbid turgescences to the surface, & to divert their action
from the Brain. Diet and Exercise assist in changing
the Constitution which is necessary to a cure. On the contrary

[illegible] a variety of remedies, which have been highly
recommended such as Bleeding Salivation Antispasmodics
Tonics & cold Bath. The reason why they are not more
useful is that they have generally been prescribed indiscriminately without
taking into Consideration, the cause of the Disease, & the constitution
of the Patient.

Idiopathic Epilepsy of the Patient be of a plethoric Constitution
we should treat the disease in the manner recommended above,
and the occasional cause & endeavour to cure the predispo
sing cause. When this Disease arises from Debility & of long
standing the cure becomes more difficult but we should not
be discouraged from attempting it. The first intention of
cure is to endeavour to put off the Paroxysm by giving
an Emetic about an Hour before it is expected, cold affu
sion before the fit, Blisters & Sinapisms to the Extremities
are useful Auxiliaries. In the interval we would recom
mend Exercise a nourishing Diet cold Bath & Tonics
Antispasmodics are useful when there is much Mobility
when the Spirits are depressed Asafoetida Camphor Ambre
grris may be resorted to. Dr Barton mentions three cures
made by him with Stramonium. it was also successful
in the hands of Dr Archer of Maryland. Dr Rush

commends it in combination with Opium Camphor & Castor-
leum, and Cupreum ammoniacum, are valuable Remedies
Frear says he has made complete cures in persons with
the faces with ℥i - ℥ii of Argyle given in the Twenty four Hours
Hubbard relates a cure by means of Injections of Nitrate
of Silver has been lately used with considerable
advantage in Epilepsy when this Disease has been of many
years standing two cases of it occur in the first and
second volumes of the Physical Journal Dr Wheler
of Georgia beginning with one sixth of a grain of the
Medicine increased the dose to eight grains in one day
cured his Patient - It has been proposed to treat Epilepsy
with Mercury, which I have seen tried without effect
Dr Hoffman cured one case by this plan; if used at
all it would be proper to combine it with Valerian -
when the returns are periodical Bark and Arsenic are
recommended - the cold Bath very important so are
exercise, company, change of Climate & long Journey -
camp life is said to have cured Cesar Blistering
over the Body is said to have completed cures, & have
been employed in the case of Bonaparte: Cattling in the
Leg has been known to effect a cure

has been already observed that Epilepsy is frequently occasioned by ostiveness, crudities, & different affections of the stomach, & by worms, poisons. In these cases is it not probable that the treatment recom-nded by Dr Hamilton at Edinburgh, supported by the experience of Dr Chapman in cases of Chorea, Hysteria, & Tetanus, be of advantage By the use of frequent & long continued purges, might we not expect break the associations of the disease, & induce a change in the consti-tion? As the above diseases are the consequence of peculiar mobility the system, & are cured by means of Cathartics, which destroy that bility, the same treatment applied to a disease depending on the same se would probably be equally successful.

Case 1. March 6. 1813 S Carolina.

A youth of 17 years of age of a plethoric constitution was attacked th Epilepsy. It was thought to have been brought on by blows receiv-me time before. He knew when the fit was coming on by a [illegible] pain in his head with other premonitory signs common an attack. He then fell down in violent convulsions th a loss of sense & ending in sleep. This returned frequently His physician treated him by bloodletting together with a ch of medicine. After trying this mode of treatment four nths unsuccessfully the patient was ~~[illegible]~~ ttended by Doctor Porter & myself. When I saw him first his face peared sallow & bloated, his countenance vacant. His pulse [illegible] at the same time he felt great languor,

his appetite was bad, & he was occasionally attacked with Hemorrhoids. At this time there was no complaint of the blows that had been received, as remedies had been used, but still the convulsions continued. I considered the disease completely formed, & continued, by the power of habit; so, the first indication of cure was to make nature discontinue this habit. July 15. 1813 We began by giving an emetic of Sulphate of Zinc & sulphate of copper combined - it operated very well, & nauseated considerably for some time afterwards, he was put on a milk & vegetable diet advised moderate exercise, & to avoid all occasional, & exciting causes - to wear loose clothes, sleep with the head elevated, & when the first symptoms of the fit take an emetic, & have a bucket of cold water poured on his head. 2d day no return of fit - took a cathartic of Calomel, Jalap & Gamboge, which operated frequently, & weakened him a little, but he felt relieved. 3 day no return of fit. He took say Lead gr ij Digitalis gr ij twice a day made in pills. The Digitalis was gradually increased - a Seton was applied in the back of the neck. 4 day the pills were continued - pulse a little reduced - 5 & 6 days continued the pills, no particular change. 7 day took a drastic cathartic which operated frequently - pulse reduced. 8 day continued pills, & took for common drink, a decoction of Viscus Quercinus. 9 & 10 continued pills pulse low, stature weakened - broke out but returned with symptoms of a fit. The cold affusions prevented. He followed the directions very strictly

This treatment was continued for near 4 weeks

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about the 3 Week his Spirits, & Appetite began to return & he seemed much better. Moderate exercise & Company was advised - He by the use of medicine, & the teton was removed - Aloetic pills were given every other night for a week to obviate costiveness - By this mode of treatment he was completely cured. I have lately heard he is in good health.

Case 2d. 1811.

Thomas Gray, a youth of 16 was ~~aged of~~ ~~a~~ Epileptic which he had had from his childhood / by the same treatment as in case 1st He has had no return of the disease.

Case 3.

A gentleman 40 years of age who had Idiopathic Epilepsy became the same treatment, & when I left home was much benefitted, & had no return of the fits. However six weeks only has elapsed which is not sufficient time to try the remedy.

I have now come to a close, and it only remains for me to return my sincere thanks, to each of the Professors of this University, for the politeness, & valuable information I have received. —

Phila
March 10th 1812